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Letter dated 11 August 2010 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Further to my latest report to the Security Council concerning the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2010/352), I hereby request the Security Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is to expire on 31 August 2010. In a letter dated 20 July 2010 addressed to me, the Prime Minister of Lebanon requested that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of one year, without amendment.

UNIFIL continues to play a crucial role in ensuring peace and stability in southern Lebanon, as well as full respect for the Blue Line by both parties. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL continues to monitor the cessation of hostilities and assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons. UNIFIL also takes all necessary action within its capabilities to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind.

I have expressed my deep concern at the exchange of fire between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces that occurred on 3 August 2010 in the general vicinity of El Adeisse. Tragically, lives were lost in the incident — the most serious between the Israel Defense Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). Two Lebanese soldiers were killed and six were injured; one Lebanese journalist was killed, and two other Lebanese civilians were wounded. One Israeli officer was killed and another officer was seriously injured. On that morning, an Israel Defense Forces patrol was attempting to cut a tree, located north of the technical fence and south of the Blue Line, using a crane. In an effort to maintain calm, UNIFIL had liaised with both parties before the Israel Defense Forces commenced the maintenance works.

During the tree-cutting operation, Lebanese troops were deployed in the immediate area; tensions rose and there was an exchange of fire. UNIFIL peacekeepers on the spot attempted to contain the situation, albeit unsuccessfully. According to preliminary reports, the Lebanese Armed Forces utilized heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. The Israel Defense Forces utilized heavy machine guns, rockets and tank and artillery fire. The exchange of fire lasted approximately three hours. Ultimately, the parties ceased firing at the request of UNIFIL, to enable the UNIFIL Deputy Force Commander, who was Acting UNIFIL

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Force Commander at the time, to reach the site of the incident by helicopter. Although the investigation by UNIFIL is ongoing, UNIFIL established that the trees being cut by the Israel Defense Forces are located south of the Blue Line, and that the Lebanese Armed Forces fired the first shot, although UNIFIL has not determined who initiated direct fire.

On the following day, 4 August 2010, the Israel Defense Forces completed its maintenance works, with Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL troops monitoring the activity. The UNIFIL Force Commander also convened an extraordinary tripartite meeting with senior representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces. The United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon also attended and addressed the meeting. Both parties renewed their commitment to the cessation of hostilities and to resolution 1701 (2006), and undertook to work with UNIFIL to ensure that such incidents are not repeated. The situation on the ground has returned to quiet. The findings of the UNIFIL investigation will be made available to both parties and communicated to the Council upon the conclusion of the investigation.

As I recalled in my latest report, the identification of the Blue Line in 2000 was solely the responsibility of the United Nations for the practical purpose of confirming the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from Lebanon in compliance with resolution 425 (1978), without prejudice to future border agreements. Both sides, despite their respective reservations in 2000 about the Blue Line, undertook to respect the Line in its entirety as identified by the United Nations. I again urge both parties to do their utmost to prevent violations of the Blue Line, to act with maximum restraint and to refrain from taking any measures close to the Blue Line that could lead to misunderstandings or be perceived by the other side as provocative. The Blue Line must be respected in its entirety.

Beginning on 28 June 2010 UNIFIL conducted a 36-hour maximum strength deployment, aimed at testing its capabilities. The exercise was initially planned as a common deployment together with the Lebanese Armed Forces. However, the Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL on 24 June 2010 that they would not participate in the exercise but that all routine operational activities with UNIFIL would continue. A public information campaign was carried out in advance to explain the purpose of the additional movements. Great care also was taken to minimize any inconvenience to the population. In total, UNIFIL carried out some 640 operational activities, including patrols and the deployment of temporary observation posts.

During the exercise, there were some 24 incidents, including temporary denials of freedom of movement by Lebanese civilians and seven incidents of stone throwing, in which four peacekeepers received minor injuries. The incidents were generally resolved quickly with the assistance of the Lebanese Armed Forces and local authorities. Following these events, on 3 July 2010, a UNIFIL patrol near the village of Qabrikha (Sector West), was blocked by a number of civilians who threw stones, punctured the tyres and broke the windows of patrol vehicles, took some UNIFIL weapons and ammunition, and assaulted the UNIFIL patrol leader. The Lebanese Armed Forces later retrieved all the weapons that had been taken during the incident and returned them to UNIFIL.

The freedom of movement of UNIFIL and the security and safety of its personnel is integral to the effective execution of its tasks. In resolution 1773 (2007) the Council urged all parties to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL and to abide scrupulously by their obligation to respect the safety of UNIFIL and

other United Nations personnel, including by avoiding any course of action which endangers United Nations personnel and by ensuring that UNIFIL is accorded full freedom of movement within its area of operations. The primary responsibility for ensuring freedom of movement to UNIFIL personnel in the area of operations lies with the Lebanese authorities. Following the incidents, the Lebanese Armed Forces reiterated their assurance that UNIFIL would enjoy unimpeded freedom of movement in its area of operations.

Notwithstanding substantial progress on the implementation of some elements of resolution 1701 (2006), more work remains to be done. Long-term sustained efforts are required to ensure that there are no armed elements in the UNIFIL area of operations, to discover and remove all weapons and related material that might still be present in the area, and to prevent the possible unauthorized transfer of weapons into the area of operations. The Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL continued to take coordinated measures to fulfil these objectives.

The Israel Defense Forces continue their occupation of part of the village of Ghajar, and an adjacent area, north of the Blue Line, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Israel must withdraw the Israel Defense Forces from the area. Israel also must cease its air violations, which contribute to tension and continue unabated.

At sea, incidents along the line of buoys, which the Government of Israel installed unilaterally and which the Government of Lebanon does not recognize, continued several times per week. While UNIFIL has no mandate to monitor the line of buoys, the issue has been raised in the tripartite forum, and the Force Commander has expressed his concern that the incidents serve to increase tension between the parties.

The Lebanese Mine Action Centre continues to coordinate humanitarian clearance operations in southern Lebanon through the Regional Mine Action Coordination Centre in Nabatiye. The United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre continues to liaise between UNIFIL and the Regional Centre in respect of operations, accreditation and quality assurance. The Coordination Centre also contributes to the Blue Line marking project.

The total number of UNIFIL military personnel as at 26 July 2010 stands at 11,492. The number includes 10,471 UNIFIL ground troops, and 794 personnel serving in the Maritime Task Force, in addition to 215 staff officers at UNIFIL headquarters and 57 staff officers at UNIFIL sector headquarters. The UNIFIL civilian component numbers 332 international and 654 national staff.

The implementation of the recommendations of the technical review carried out jointly by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNIFIL is ongoing. The recommendation to establish a Blue Line task force with dedicated engineering capabilities is being implemented. The process of visibly marking the Blue Line continues to make steady progress. The total length of the five sectors agreed to be marked thus far amounts to approximately 39 kilometres.

To date, 77 coordinates have been agreed; 57 markers have been installed; 10 are under construction; and the coordinates of 10 points are set to be measured on the ground with the parties. Construction work on the first stage of the Blue Line road project, in which existing roads are being linked by constructing 11 road connections, is also ongoing.

The technical review concluded that the Maritime Task Force remains an essential element of UNIFIL. During the past year, the Maritime Task Force of UNIFIL has witnessed a gradual decrease in the number of available assets, particularly frigates. An onshore command and control arrangement was put in place on 1 July 2010 under the leadership of Italy as an interim measure until a lead nation comes forward that can command the Maritime Task Force with a flagship at sea. Italy has agreed to maintain its leadership role until 31 August 2010. I am concerned that to date no nation has come forward to succeed Italy in the lead nation role — be it with a flagship at sea or under the temporary onshore arrangement. In order for the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force to continue to carry out its dual-mandated role — to help the Lebanese navy prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon by carrying out maritime interdiction operations, and to provide training for the country's naval personnel — the necessary maritime assets and leadership must be forthcoming.

I attach great importance to the recommendation by the technical review to formalize a regular strategic dialogue mechanism between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out analyses of ground forces and maritime assets, and to set a series of benchmarks reflecting the correlation between the capacities and responsibilities of UNIFIL vis-à-vis those of the Lebanese Armed Forces, with a view to identifying Lebanese Army requirements for implementing tasks mandated in resolution 1701 (2006). Pending the decision of the Government of Lebanon to officially endorse the strategic dialogue mechanism, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces are engaged in preliminary discussions about a framework for the dialogue.

Four years have passed since the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006). Despite the many achievements, challenges remain. The recent exchange of fire between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces shows how quickly the relatively stable and secure environment in southern Lebanon that UNIFIL has helped to establish, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, can change. I remain concerned with the fragile state of the cessation of hostilities, and call on all parties to ensure full respect for resolution 1701 (2006) and to redouble their efforts to secure a permanent ceasefire.

I would reiterate that it remains essential that the international community assist the Lebanese Armed Forces to become more effective and better resourced to fulfil their responsibilities, including along the Blue Line. The long-term objective of UNIFIL is to gradually transfer responsibilities currently carried out by the Force, on land and at sea, to the Lebanese Armed Forces, and have the Lebanese Armed Forces assume effective security control over the UNIFIL area of operations and Lebanese territorial waters, in line with resolution 1701 (2006).

I would like to express my appreciation to the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Alberto Asarta Cuevas, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for their dedication and the work that they are carrying out in southern Lebanon in the service of peace.

Regarding the financial aspects of UNIFIL, by its resolution 64/282 of 24 June 2010, the General Assembly appropriated to the Special Account for UNIFIL the total amount of US$ 518.7 million gross for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNIFIL beyond 31 August 2010, the cost of maintaining it will be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

As at 31 May 2010, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNIFIL Special Account amounted to $40.7 million. As at 22 July 2010, amounts owed to troop contributors totalled $13.0 million. Reimbursement of troop- and contingent-owned equipment costs has been made for the periods up to 31 May 2010, and 31 March 2010, respectively, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

With the above information in mind, I recommend that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2011.

I should be grateful if you would bring this letter to the attention of the members of the Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon